



Public Policy Research,  
Development,  
and Evaluation

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## Michigan House of Representatives

House Judiciary Committee  
Representative Paul Condino, Chair

Testimony of Jeffrey D. Padden  
Regarding  
Prisoner Identification

March 28, 2007

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Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the issue of Prisoner Identification. My name is Jeff Padden, and I am the president of Public Policy Associates, Incorporated (PPA), a Lansing-based, national policy research firm. I speak to you again as the Michigan Site Coordinator for the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Transition from Prison to Communities Initiative. In that role, I am responsible for assisting the State of Michigan in its implementation of the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI). Part of my responsibility with NIC is to bring a national perspective and insight to the work here, in terms of corrections research and current practice.

As I mentioned in my recent testimony on MPRI, my policy experience with corrections dates back to 1975, when I became a member of the Michigan House of Representatives. I served on the House Committee on Corrections for ten years and chaired the committee for eight of those years. At PPA, we also conduct extensive research on workforce issues, which is also relevant to the Prisoner ID question.

The MPRI changes that. It takes a common-sense approach to improving public safety—informed and driven by extensive research that has been conducted over the past two decades. My belief, based on my experience with corrections policy and my understanding of the research, is that the MPRI can make a substantial contribution to improving public safety, and we are beginning to see such results already. The all-too-frequent practice of putting prisoners back on the streets without legal identification will continue to impede the success of MPRI and, in the process, will result in more Michiganians—your constituents—becoming victims of crime. If we are serious about public protection, we—all of us in this room—must commit to getting this problem resolved with dispatch. Based on my observation of how the prisoner ID issue is handled around the country, it is my belief that Michigan could have and should have solved this problem years ago.

MPRI focuses on reducing the risk posed by former prisoners by identifying specific risk areas—criminogenic needs—and focusing all programming on addressing them. By doing so systematically and consistently, overall risk to the public declines. Community resources are also brought to bear in this direction. Parole agents and community service providers reach into the prisons to plan for the transition to the community, so that supervision and relevant services can continue without interruption.

The common risk areas are not surprising: lack of workforce skills and jobs, unstable housing, substance abuse, and cognitive problems. Regardless of the progress made while a person is incarcerated, the moment of release is decisive. The progress toward protecting the public can be lost quickly, despite the in-prison work and planning for supervision and services in the community, if unnecessary barriers are erected. Delays in being able to apply for a job, rent an apartment, enroll in a substance abuse program, or apply for Medicaid or food stamps mean that the upside progress stops and, even worse, former prisoners tend to revert to their previous ways, and they do so quickly.

All states face this issue and some that are serious about reentry have solved it. I would like to quote from several reports that provide excellent examples of how this can be done:

- In Maryland, the motor vehicles administration accepts prison identification cards from people seeking a state-issued photo ID. The Montgomery County Department of Correction and the Maryland Department of Parole and Probation have developed a written agreement

that outlines the responsibilities of supervision officers who participate in the county pre-release center.<sup>1</sup>

- The Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles (OMV) is piloting a program at several Department of Corrections facilities where state ID cards and license renewals are being made on-site for inmates prior to release. OMV staff visit the correctional facilities quarterly, at which time inmates within six to eight months of scheduled release may request a card. Inmates are expected to pay out of pocket for the IDs unless they are eligible for welfare support. The IDs are included as part of the release packet.... The OMV collaborates with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to ensure that inmates have the necessary identification for ID card issue and, prior to OMV visits, the DOC obtains information from the OMV about the status of all inmates requesting state ID cards. Individuals who are already in the OMV system can use their prisoner ID card as proof of identification for the state ID card. Individuals who are not already registered with the agency must also present a social security card and birth certificate. When necessary, DOC staff will help inmates to obtain proper identification.<sup>2</sup>
- Two states—Illinois and Montana—have laws requiring the departments of motor vehicles (DMVs) to exchange a department of corrections-issued ID for state-issued ID. In Montana, inmates receive a prison card issued by the Department of Corrections that contains a photo or digitized image of the applicant, as well as the applicant's date of birth and adult offender number, discharge certificate, or parole order. Under Montana law, these documents can be exchanged within 60 days of release for a free state-issued ID.<sup>3</sup>
- In Missouri, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Revenue are working together to provide state identification cards to offenders before release. To obtain a state identification card, offenders must have a social security card and birth certificate. All identification documentation is scanned at the institution and electronically sent to DOR along with an electronic application and picture. This process was to be piloted at Algoa Correctional Center and Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center.<sup>4</sup>
- Twenty state DMVs accept some form of department of corrections documentation as proof of identity.<sup>5</sup>

While Michigan is the national leader in implementing a comprehensive, ambitious approach to prisoner reentry, we are clearly behind on solving the Prisoner ID problem. You can help rectify that failing today. I urge the chair to set a short timeline for the parties to resolve the issues discussed here today and to return to the committee with a workable solution that will remove this barrier to public safety and prisoner success.

In closing, I want to again thank you for your diligent efforts to serve the public. I would be happy to assist in any way you might find useful.

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<sup>1</sup> *Why Planning for Release Matters*, Vera Institute of Justice, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Missouri Reentry Program Website.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*, 2004.